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ABSTRACT

Results of previous investigations of life satisfaction in the aged have suggested that health, socioeconomic factors, and social interaction are most strongly and consistently related to life satisfaction. However, a great deal of variance in life satisfaction remains unexplained. Men (N=19) and women (N=21) aged 65 years or older were interviewed using the Life Satisfaction Index A and a measure of ego development in order to investigate the role of ego development in accounting for life satisfaction in aged individuals. Analyses of results indicated that people functioning at the post-conformist level of ego development were more satisfied with their lives than those at the conformist level, and that ego development increased the predictability of life satisfaction when combined with the known predictors of health, activity and social participation, and socioeconomic status. The increased predictability of life satisfaction suggests that it may be useful to further explore the contribution of ego development and other psychological variables to life satisfaction. (JAC)

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Ego Development in Predicting Life Satisfaction in the Aged

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A number of previous investigations have attempted to identify variables that correlated with life satisfaction in aged people. A review of previous studies indicated that, although different conceptualizations and measures of life satisfaction and its variables were employed, most studies yielded comparable results (Larson, 1978). These results suggested that health, socioeconomic factors, and degree of social interaction were most strongly and consistently related to life satisfaction. However, the results of these investigations demonstrated that much of the variance in life satisfaction remained unexplained. Such studies restricted their inquiries to situational factors impinging upon the individual. Personality variables may be responsible for accounting for a portion of the unexplained variance in satisfaction, and, therefore, future studies should include a personality measure in order to investigate its contribution to life satisfaction.

Swensen (1977) postulated that the central personality variable involves the construct of ego development. He describes ego development as the

> "...master personality trait, which describes the stage of development of the ego or self-system and which organizes and integrates all other aspects of the personality. Several continua run through the stages of ego development from the least mature to

> the most mature. The person develops from the earliest stage, in which there is no cognitive differentiation, to the higher stages, in which there is extensive differentiation of persons, situations, objects, feelings, and actions.

Research employing the construct of ego development demonstrated that, in retirement age individuals, satisfaction with marital relationships was related to levels of ego development (Swensen, Eskew, and Kohlhepp, 1981). Marital satisfaction was measured, in part, by love expression, and the results of this study indicated that retired couples at the post-conformist level of ego development expressed significantly more love to each other than those couples at the conformist level. Although satisfaction with one's marriage is only one of a variety of factors which may affect the older adult's life satisfaction, these results appear to suggest that a relationship may exist between ego development and the broader area of life satisfaction.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the contribution of ego development in conjunction with previously researched variables as a means of accounting for a greater amount of variance in life satisfaction. This study also focused on determining the relationship between ego development and life satisfaction.

Methods. This investigation included 40 subjects aged 65 years or older. Subjects were volunteers from the Purdue Retirees Organization and from Senior Centers in north-central Indiana. Twenty-one of the subjects were women, and 19 of the participants were men.

The Life Satisfaction Index A (Neugarten, Havighurst, and Tobin, 1961) was employed as the dependent measure. The independent variables include measures from two categories: 1) situational factors as assessed by previously employed measures of health (Markides and Martin, 1979), activity and social participation (Edwards and Klemmack, 1973), and socio-economic status (Edwards and Klemmack, 1973), and 2) the personality variable of ego development as assessed by the Washington University Sentence Completion Test for Ego Development (Loevinger and Wessler, 1970). The instruments were administered in an interview format as the investigator read all questions aloud to the subjects and recorded their responses.

Results. In order to test for a difference in the amounts of reported life satisfaction between those at the conformist vs. the post-conformist levels of ego development, a t-test of significance was performed. The t-value of 2.86 was significant at the .007 level. These results indicated that respondents in the post-conformist group reported significantly greater life satisfaction than did those respondents in the conformist group.

As previously discussed, the known predictors of health, activity and social participation, and socioeconomic status leave much unexplained variance. To investigate the effect of ego development in improving prediction of life satisfaction in the aged, two multiple regression analyses were computed. One analysis included the variable of ego development, while the other analysis did not. A hierarchical model was employed as it allowed an analysis of the amount of unique variance accounted for by each predictor as it was entered into the equation (Cohen and Cohen, 1975).

The order of entry of variables into the regression equation was dictated by their zero-order correlations with life satisfaction. Based on these correlations, health was entered first, activity and social participation was entered next, and socioeconomic status was entered last. Overall, the analysis indicated that approximately 30% of the variance in life satisfaction was predicted by the three variables described. This final multiple regression equation was significant in accounting for criterion measure variance ($F=5.04$, $p=.005$).

In order to test if ego development increased the prediction of life satisfaction, a multiple regression analysis was computed which included the measure of ego development. The order of entry of the variables into the equation was again dictated by their zero-order coreelations with the criterion measure. Based on these correlations, the order of entry was

as follows: ego development, health, activity and social participation, and socioeconomic status. The multiple regression equation, including all four predictor variables, accounted for a total of 36% of the variance in life satisfaction, and this was demonstrated to be a significant amount of predicted variance ($F=4.84$, $p=.003$). Ego development was responsible for predicting half of this total variance ($r^2=.18$, $F=8.17$, $p=.007$). The previously described results of the multiple regression equation which did not include ego development indicated that 30% of the variance in life satisfaction was accounted for ($F=5.04$, $p=.005$). It was demonstrated that the ego development measure, when combined with the other known predictors, increased the prediction of life satisfaction.

Conclusions. The results of this investigation indicated that people functioning at the post-conformist level of ego development were more satisfied with their lives as compared to those at the conformist level. Post-conformists may have had an ability to respond more effectively to their environmental exigencies which promoted adjustment to the circumstances and, perhaps, were more able to change these circumstances in order to promote increased life satisfaction. It is possible that post-conformists were able to not only adapt themselves to their changing life situations, but they may have also been better skilled in controlling and arranging their life circumstances in such a way as to affect higher levels of life satisfaction.

In contrast, it may be that lower scores of life satisfaction reported by people within the conformist levels of ego development were related to the relative lack or ineffectiveness of their skills in adjusting to the changes associated with aging. It may also be related to their comparatively inferior proficiency in changing and arranging their life circumstances in ways that enhanced satisfaction with life.

This study was also designed to determine if ego development increased the prediction of life satisfaction when combined with the known predictors of health, activity and social participation and socioeconomic status. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that the equation including all predictor variables except ego development accounted for a total of 30% of the variance. The equation including ego development accounted for 36% of the variance, and ego development was responsible for explaining half (18%) of this variance. A previous investigation utilizing measures of health, socioeconomic status, and activity and social participation employed a multiple regression analysis, and it was demonstrated that these variables accounted for 24% of the variance in life satisfaction (Edwards and Klemmack, 1973). Another study investigated the relationships between eleven predictor variables and life satisfaction employed a multiple regression analysis and found that these measures explained 32% of the variance in life satisfaction (Spreitzer and Snyder, 1973).

Therefore, the regression analyses employed in the present study demonstrated that ego development increased the predictability of life satisfaction. When compared to previous research, the regression equation including ego development predicted a greater amount of variance in life satisfaction and explained it with a fewer number of variables.

The findings of this study have implications for intervention in terms of modifying life satisfaction of older adults. The significance of ego development in predicting life satisfaction indicated that the previously emphasized sociological variables of health, socioeconomic status, and social participation do not necessarily represent areas for the most effective interventions. It appears that these sociological variables are, in part, a reflection of psychological variables as represented in this study by ego development. Therefore, satisfaction may not be related only to sociological conditions, but it may also involve how individuals view these conditions and adjust themselves accordingly. It seems that people functioning within the post-conformist levels may be more capable of developing perspectives of acceptance of their conditions and more capable of adapting to the circumstances in order to promote increased life satisfaction. This indicates that interventions with those reporting lower life satisfaction could focus on aiding individuals in formulating alternative explanations of the impact and effect of events which have

negatively affected their life satisfaction. This may promote understanding and an attitude of acceptance which may help improve their satisfaction.

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